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LIFE IN COLONIAL DAYS

BY L. MORTON TILLINGHAST

F. A. OWEN PUBLISHING COMPANY
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INSTRUCTOR LITERATURE SERIES

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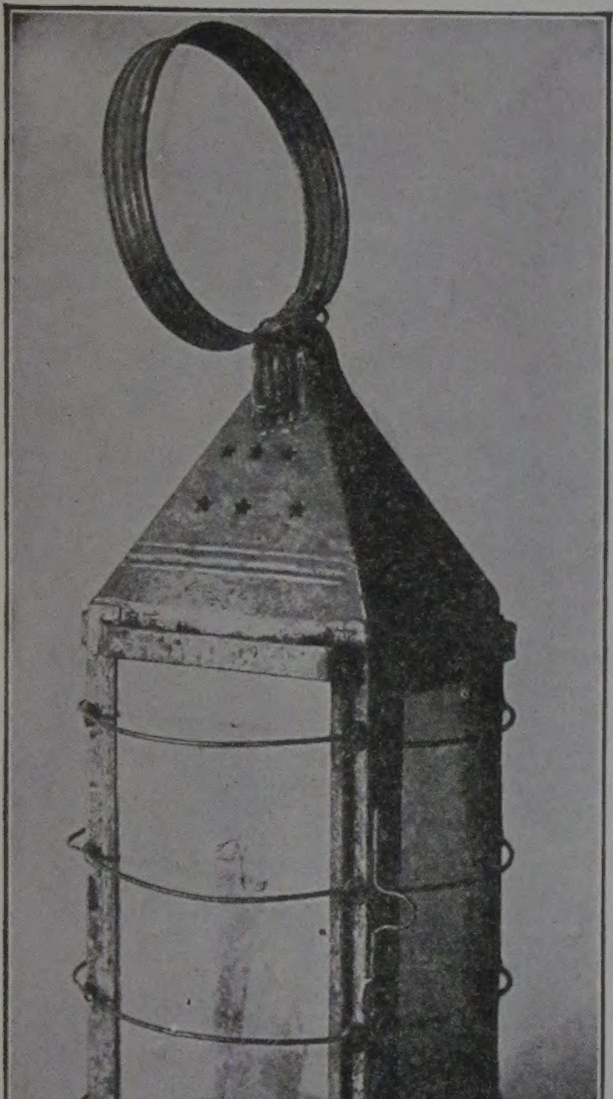
The Lights They Used



Candle Lantern

In these days of gas, electricity and other bright illuminants, it would seem impossible to work or even to play, with any degree of comfort, with the lights that were in general use in the early days of this country. But rude and imperfect as they were, they served their purpose many years, and only by slow and sometimes very short steps have our present systems of lighting been perfected.

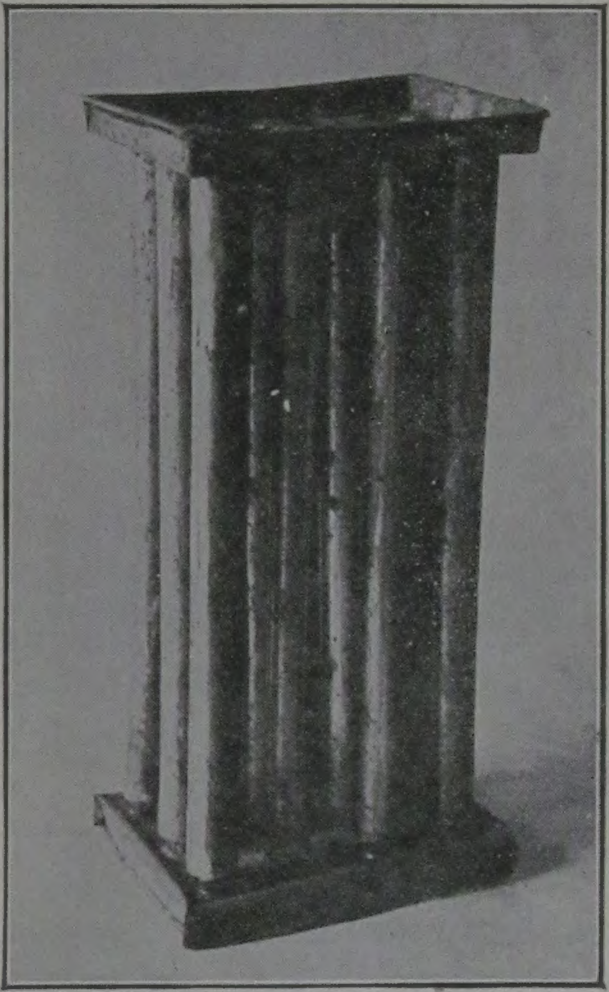
Imagine if you can, you children who live in comfortable, well-lighted homes of today, how it would seem to be obliged to get your lessons for tomorrow by the flickering light from the wood piled high in an old-fashioned fire-place, with a great square chimney through which you could look up and see the shining stars above. And yet many of our old-time grandparents acquired under just these circumstances the foundation of knowledge that helped them later to become the strong and resourceful men and women to whom this country is indebted for its very being.

The first attempt at artificial light, aside from the light of the fireplace, was the burning of the pitch-knots, or candlewood as they were called in some sections. The pitch-knots were the knots, and sometimes the roots, of the pitch-pine tree that grew in great abundance in the early days, and the gathering of a supply of this candlewood for use during the long winter evenings was one of the autumn duties of the farmer boys. When burning, these knots gave a weak, flickering light, accompanied by an intensely black smoke, while hot pitch dropped continually from the heated wood. For these reasons they were usually burned in or near the fireplace, supported on a flat stone or fixed into cracks in the crude masonry of the fireplace.

Rush lights came a little later and were made by stripping the outer bark from common rushes and soaking the porous interior or pith in hot tallow that had been saved by the careful housewife from her cooking. When cold, these could be lighted and gave a much better light than the pine-knot and without the dripping and smoke.

In a few years these were replaced by the tallow candle that for many years remained the standard light of our grandparents. The making of these candles was one of the duties of every housewife, and every young girl was carefully instructed in the details of their manufacture. Candles were made by two different methods, the most common of which was the process known as "dipping," from which came the name of "tallow dip," by which the candles were known in some sections. Every particle of grease and fat was carefully saved and kept in a stone jar or wooden box until a sufficient quantity for a "dipping" had accumulated.

Candle dipping was an event looked forward to with pleasure, by the younger members of the family at least, as a break in the rather monotonous routine of household duties in those days. A great iron kettle was hung on a crane over a hot fire in the kitchen fireplace, and all the accumulated scraps of grease were put into it, where they were melted and skimmed until nothing but the pure tallow remained. While this heating and skimming were going on, the candle poles and candle rods that were saved from season to season were brought out and placed in position to use. The poles were laid upon two chairs, just far enough apart to hold the candle rods from which hung the candles during the dipping. The wicking, which was of loosely twisted cotton, or tow, in the earlier days was cut into pieces twice the length the candle was planned to be. Then each one was tightly twisted, doubled around the candle rod, the ends brought together and released, when they twisted together in the



Candle Molds

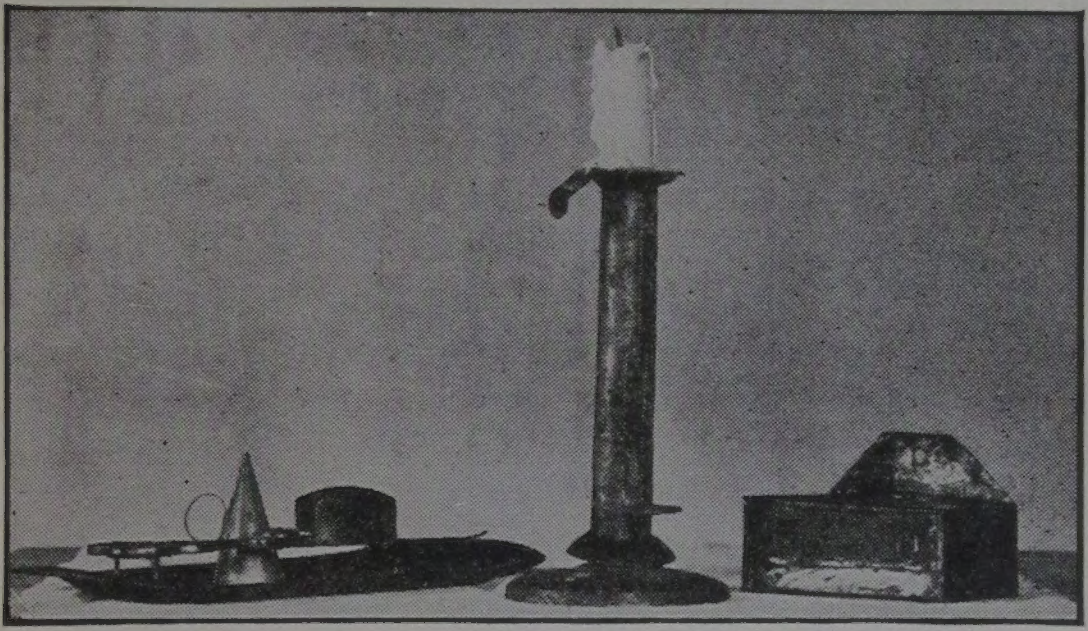
reverse direction, forming a firm wick hanging by a loop from the candle rod. The rods were small smooth sticks about three feet long, and from six to ten wicks were placed upon each one, keeping them just far enough apart to prevent their hitting together while being dipped.

When the tallow was thoroughly purified, the kettle was removed from the fire and placed on the floor, which had previously been carefully covered with papers or cloth. Each rod was taken up separately, and after seeing that the wicks were all straight and in their proper positions, they were dipped for a moment into the hot tallow and then laid across the candle poles to cool. If there were a considerable number of rods, by the time the last one had been dipped the first one was cool enough to have the process repeated. And so, by alternate dippings and coolings, the candles steadily grew until they were the required size to fit the holders in which they were to be used. As the tallow was used out of the kettle, boiling water was turned in to take its place. The remaining tallow floated on the water, which served the double purpose of keeping the kettle full and keeping the tallow at the right temperature. When thoroughly cooled, the candles were carefully slipped off the rods and stored in a cool place until needed.

In some sections candles were run into molds of tin or pewter made to mold from six to twenty-four at a pouring. The wicks were hung from a small rod or wire in the center of each mold and the hot tallow was carefully poured around them. Candles made by this method were of uniform shape and size, but by many were thought to burn out faster than those that were dipped.

The wax of the bayberry, that grew plentifully in some parts of New England, was sometimes used for making candles. The berries when ripe are coated with a kind of wax that readily melts and rises to the top when the berries are put into boiling water. This wax has first a dirty look, but when refined it is of a delicate green color. It made a harder candle than tallow and lasted longer, besides giving out a pleasant aromatic odor while burning.

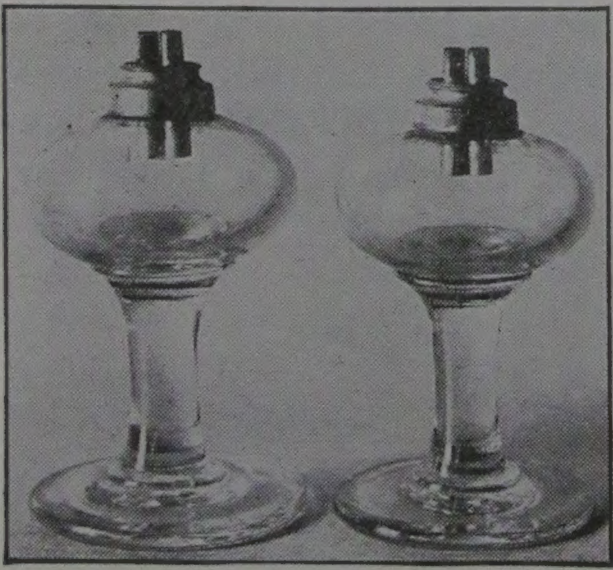
In use, the candles were held in metal holders, or candlesticks as they were called. The more common ones were made of iron or tin, while brass and silver were used in the manufacture of the more costly ones. Matching the candlesticks, in design and material, were also trays containing a pair of snuffers to trim the wick when needed, and a cone-shaped extinguisher to put over the top of the candle when the light was to be put out. This kept the wick from smoking, as it did with a disagreeable odor when blown out. In some houses were candle beams, or frames of wood with candle holders attached, so that more candles could be burned at one time and an added light produced. They resembled in a crude way the candelabra of today.



Candlestick, Matches, Snuffers, Extinguisher, Tray,

Candle lanterns made of tin perforated with many small holes, through which shone faint rays of light from the candle inside, were in common use for many years, and a little later an improved lantern was made with pieces of window glass fitted into the sides.

The earliest forms of lamps for burning oil were the "Betty lamps" and "Phoebe lamps." The oil holder in these lamps was a shallow, oval shaped dish with a spout an inch or two long at one side from which protruded a wick or a piece of cloth. This end was lighted and gave out a dull light and a very disagreeable odor at the same time. Most of them dripped oil as they burned and were anything but a pleasure to the neat housekeeper. Iron, brass, and pewter were used in the construction of these lamps and some of them were fitted with hooks to hang them on nails or chair backs. With the advent of the whaling industry, there came into existence the whale oil lamp, which burned the oil through an open burner, but never gave very satisfactory light and was inclined to smoke. One of the best illuminants of early times was a "fluid," as it was called, consisting of one part turpentine to four parts alcohol. This fluid was burned in a lamp similar to the whale oil lamp and gave a clear, steady, bright light, and was almost absolutely smokeless. The lamps were first made of pewter and tin but later were almost exclusively made of glass.


Fluid Lamps

With the discovery of petroleum, giving us the kerosene of modern times, which, in spite of the encroachments of gas and electricity still remains a popular light, the earlier methods, with the exception of the candle, have passed into history, each having served its purpose well as a stepping-stone in the path of progress.

How They Kept Warm

One of the most important problems that the early settlers in this country had to solve was how to keep comfortably warm during the long, cold winters. In place of the modern systems of hot air, hot water and steam, all that our early ancestors had to depend upon to furnish heat, both for cooking and comfort, was the great open fireplace, for even stoves were not used until a later period.

The first houses were built of logs and usually consisted of only one room, with a huge fireplace often extending entirely across one end. One of the regular fall jobs of the men folks of the family was the chinking or filling in of the open spaces between the logs with clay or mud to keep out the bitter winter winds. Later, when the houses were built of boards, the chinking was done away with, but they were annually banked about the underpinning with sods or boughs from evergreen trees, not only to make the house comfortable to live in but also to protect the vegetables stored in the cellar from the intense cold of winter.

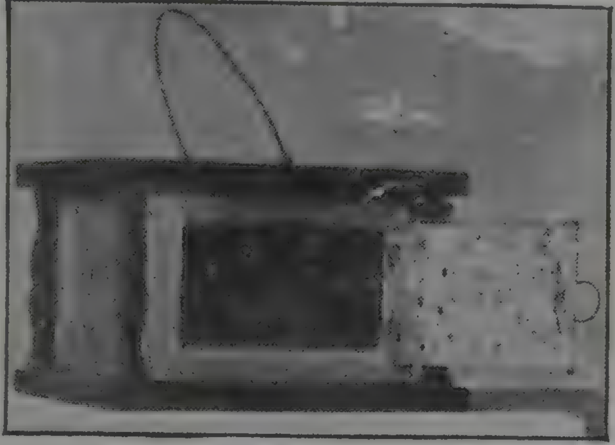
Warming Pan

In the older colonial houses the fireplace was of immense size, and as the supply of wood seemed then inexhaustible, large logs were rolled into them for back logs, and what would be in these days an extravagant quantity of wood was burned with rather unsatisfactory results judged by the standards of today. A large pile of wood cut into proper length was at that time a sign of industry and prosperity.

In the ordinary house the kitchen was the only room to have a fireplace, and throughout the cold season was the center of all domestic and social life. Even with the great fire that was kept burning, there was often room for seats in the corners of the fireplace from which the stars overhead could be plainly seen up the great square chimney. Rain or snow often came down on the fire and sometimes put it out, and the icy winds, blowing down the chimney, would scatter ashes and coals about the room. At the best, the room was warm only a few feet from the fire, and there are authentic accounts of ink freezing while people were writing by the light of the pitch-knot in the chimney corner.

In many of the kitchens was a turn-up bed, hinged to the wall at the head and resting on clumsy legs when let down at night. This was the rude predecessor of the modern cabinet bed, and in it slept the master and mistress. When there was a visitor the terror of going to bed in the spare room was somewhat overcome by the use of the warming-pan, a shallow dish of copper three or four inches deep, with a perforated cover. The pan usually had a wooden handle several feet long. Just before bedtime the pan would be filled nearly full of live coals from the fireplace, and then run about between the sheets of the bed, the user being careful to keep it in constant motion to prevent scorching of the sheets. Sometimes the bedstead was shut in by heavy curtains hung from the ceiling, to keep out the draughts. All of the best beds were made of goose feathers, and the coverings were linen sheets, woolen blankets, quilts, comforters and spreads of intricate patterns, all made by the skilful housewife. Many of the old Dutch settlers slept between two feather beds.

Everyone had to go to church in the olden days and as there was no provision for heating the churches, it was quite a problem to keep warm during the services, which often lasted three or four hours. In some instances a kind of bag was made, either from the skin of some animal or of a heavy woolen material, which was fastened to the seat. Into this the person stepped and then pulled it up over the knees. Then the foot stove came into general use. This was a rectangular box of tin or sheet-iron held in a sort of wooden frame and perforated with many small holes, sometimes worked into fancy designs. At one side was a door through which a sheet-iron dish full of burning coals was placed inside. Upon starting for church, the stove was put on the floor of the sleigh and used to rest the feet upon. Arriving at the church, the stove was refilled from the hearth of some nearby settler and taken into the church to serve the double role of foot-warmer and foot stool.



A Foot Stove

Occasionally there were seen hand-warmers fashioned on much the same plan as the foot stove but smaller in size. Many of the old churches had erected near them small houses or sheds in which was a big fireplace. Here the worshipers ate their lunch between services and refilled their stoves. After a time it was discovered that soapstone had a peculiar quality for holding heat, and as it was soft and easily cut, conveniently shaped blocks were secured, heated before the fire and then slipped into bags of some heavy woolen stuff. These soapstones, as they were called, would hold the heat for several hours and gradually replaced the footstove.

The first stoves burned wood and were box shaped, of thin metal, with three sides inside the house and the door outside, so that when wood was to be put in some one had to go out of doors to do it. After this came the Pennsylvania fireplace or Franklin stove, invented by Benjamin Franklin in 1742, which burned wood or coal, and in an improved form is popular today for heating camps and summer homes. Following this came the air-tight stove made of thin iron, which burned wood and gave out an intense heat.

Then in turn came improved coal stoves, hot air furnaces, and the systems of steam and hot water heating that go so far toward making the present generation comfortable and healthy.

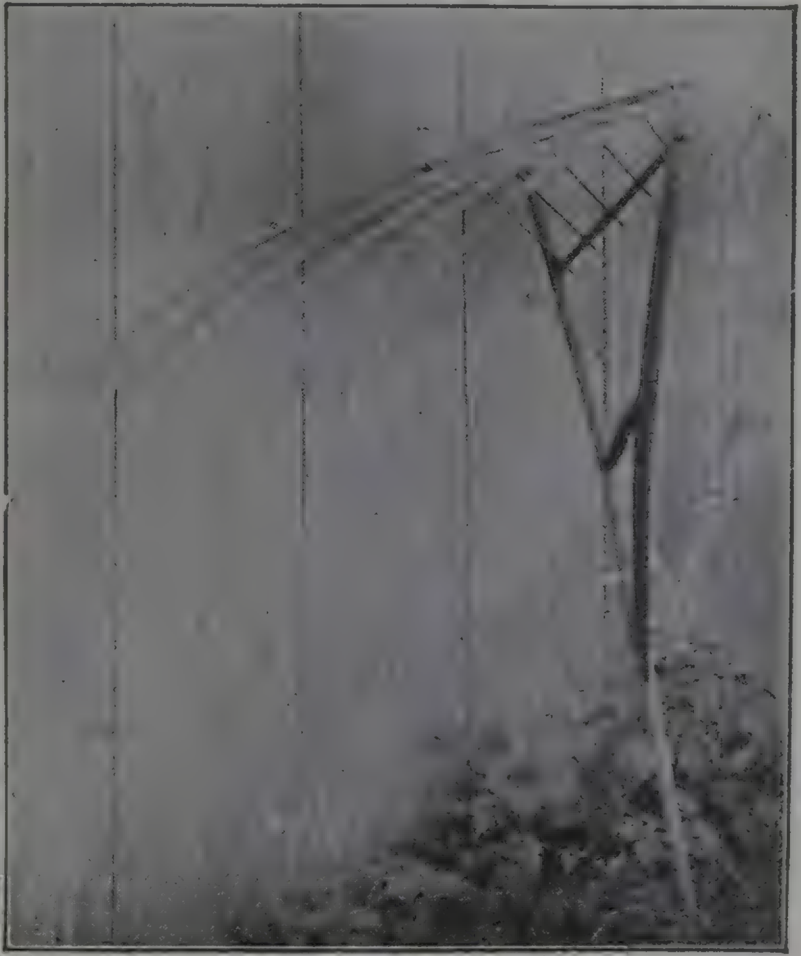
With the perfecting of the electric heating apparatus, now used to some extent, another step forward in the progress of heating systems, begun in so crude a manner by our forefathers, will have been taken.

Out-of-Doors with the Men Folk

While our grandmothers were busy indoors with the many details of housework and with the making of clothes and bed coverings, our grandfathers were equally active with the many and varied duties that devolved upon them out-of-doors. In the earlier days, as soon as the log house was built and made ready to live in, the next thing to do was to clear a piece of land and get it into condition so that it would produce their simple food and materials to make their clothing.

First the trees had to be cut and the stumps removed. This in itself was most laborious work, but in many cases it was rendered still more trying by the constant vigilance that had to be used against their Indian foes that for many years lurked in the shadow of the forest, and most of this work was done with a gun within easy reach ready for instant use in case of danger. This need for protection was so universal that Sundays the men carried their guns with them to church—and not a few times were they called upon to use them.

The methods of cultivation used at that time were simple in the extreme, but having the virgin soil, enriched by the decayed vegetation of many years, to work on, the methods were sufficient for the times, and good crops were raised on land that today would yield next to nothing were it not for the improved methods and modern machinery used. Besides



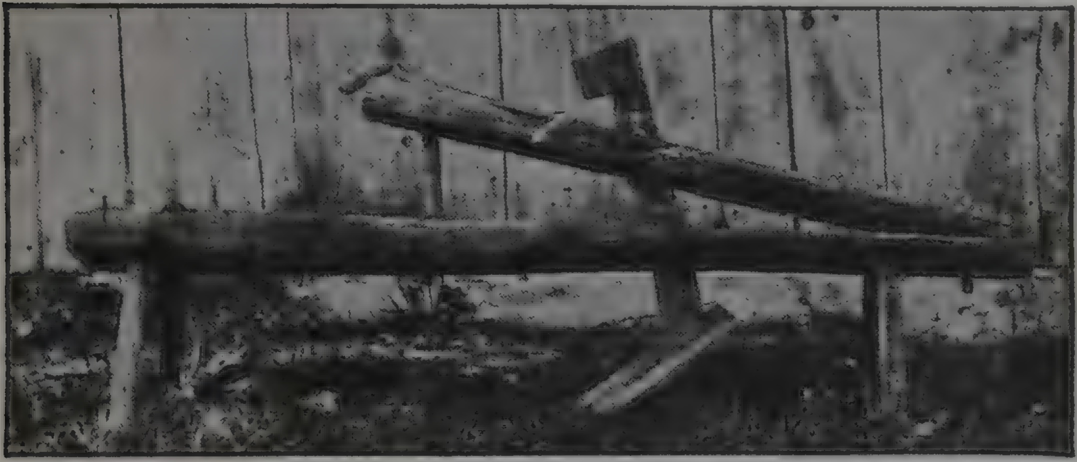
Grain Cradle

the corn, potatoes, and other vegetables that had to be raised to furnish food, fields of flax had to be cultivated to produce the linen that was used in making sheets and the finer articles of clothing, and also pasturage provided for flocks of sheep whose fleeces furnished the material to make the heavy garments necessary to keep the people warm in winter.

The different tasks followed each other in rapid succession, making the life one of almost constant toil, with hours that would hardly be approved by the most liberal labor union of the present time. As soon as the snow was gone, the ground had to be prepared to receive the crops, and after they commenced to grow it was only by constant and vigorous use of the hoe that the crop of thrifty weeds that immediately sprang up could be kept from outgrowing and killing out entirely the useful plants that the farmer was trying to raise. In early summer the cutting and curing of the hay had to be attended to, and this was soon followed by the harvesting of whatever grain crop the farmer had planted. Then came the gathering and husking of corn and the digging of potatoes. During the fall days the bushes that had grown during the summer on newly cleared land had to be cut or killed, and stones cleared from the cultivated fields and built into that network of stone walls that today covers the farming sections of New England. As the winter came on, the problem of getting wood to feed the great fireplaces of those times came up and usually kept the farmer busy most of the time until the warm winds of spring gave warning that again planting time was near.

Even in stormy weather there was no let-up to the work, for there were many odd jobs that could be done indoors, saved for just such days. Every farmer had to be truly a ‘‘Jack at all trades'' for many years, and by the samples of their work that have been preserved, they were pretty good at some of them. Many of the utensils used in the household were made of wood and fashioned by the farmers' hands. Plates, spoons, mugs, churns and many other articles of common household use still remain to show the skill of the old-time farmer with the rude tools at his command.

One of the curious implements of long ago was the shave brake used in the making of barrel hoops. It was a kind of rough bench with a seat at one end and a swinging head so arranged that by the pressure of the feet a rough split sapling could be firmly held while it was worked down to the necessary thinness with a drawing knife held in both hands of the operator. Another old-fashioned tool that has been practically driven out of existence by the modern reaper and binder is the grain cradle. This was really nothing more than a scythe with a number of wooden fingers added. In use the fingers supported the heavy heads of grain until by a peculiar side motion of the reaper the grain was laid carefully at one side in an even row.



Shave Brake for Making Barrel Hoops

Husking corn, in later years when the husking "bee" came into fashion, had its pleasant side, for then the neighbors all came in and, in anticipation of the good old-time supper and dance that was to follow, the work was soon accomplished. But when it all had to be done by one man, it was a long tedious job usually done in some old shed on days that were cold or wet.

Looking back, at these days it seems that the lives of the men of olden times were filled with the hardest of work, and few who have had any experience with the old-time way of farming have any regrets that modern science and machinery have driven out the methods of our grandfathers.

Where They Went to School

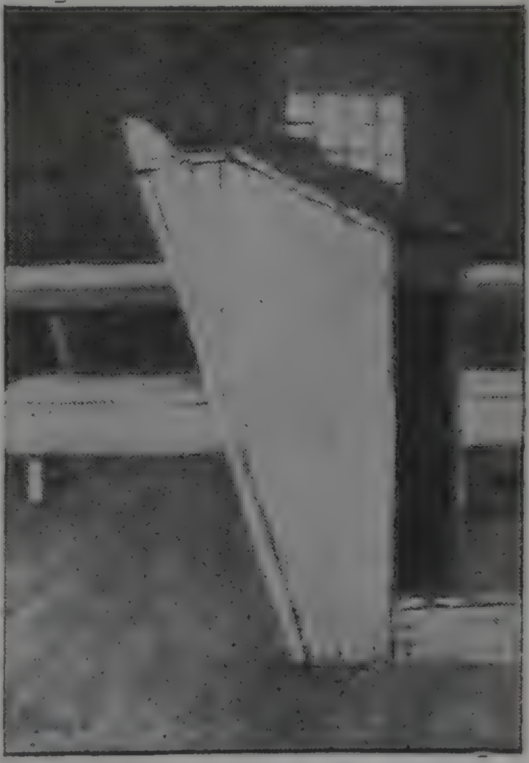
In those early days of the colonies, when danger from Indians threatened all who ventured far from their own hearthstones, there were no schools for the children to attend, and such rudimentary education as they acquired was imparted to them by their parents, with the occasional assistance of the minister. But as the number of children increased, the need of some better method made itself felt, and resulted in the feeble beginning from which has grown, step by step, the great educational system of today.

In some localities there were found women who through some infirmity were unfitted for the laborious housework of the time, and to one of these, whose only qualification for this work perhaps might be that she had the time, would be sent the children of the near by families for a stated number of hours each day to be taught reading, writing and "figgering," which for some time were the only branches taught. In return for these services, the parents of the pupils furnished the teacher with articles of food and clothing, or performed for her such work as she was unable to attend to.

Then as the population increased, better equipped teachers became available and the moving school came into existence. Some family, usually one which had several children, would set apart a room for the purpose, and there would be installed a chair and table for the teacher, and rough boards, sometimes placed upon stones or pieces of wood, arranged for seating the children. Here for a time the children of the neighborhood would assemble daily, and after the manner of the time pursue their studies. Then some one else would offer a room, and the seats would be taken up by the older scholars, moved to the new location and the school continued there.

After a time this system was abolished and the sessions were held in meeting-houses, or in some cases small houses were built of logs and used exclusively for the purpose. These log schoolhouses were heated by immense fireplaces that often took up one entire end of the room. In some cases the house had no floor and the seats were supported on stakes driven into the ground.

As time went on, better buildings were erected, and a single long desk was built to extend around three sides of the room a little distance from the wall, while back of it, at a convenient height, was arranged a continuous plank seat. When one wished to sit down, he had either to step over the seat or walk round the end. This seat had no back and must have been far from comfortable. In front of the desk was another plank, set lower down,



Master's Desk

on which sat the younger members of the school, who, having no books, needed no desk. In these schoolhouses the master usually sat behind a high desk erected at one end of the room and during recitations the classes stood in the center of the room facing him. There were no blackboards, but occasionally a school would be furnished with a globe on which was drawn a crude diagram of land and sea, as known at the time. Wood was furnished by those who had pupils in school, and the older boys sawed and split it, carried it into the house, built the fires and performed any other work that was necessary.

The fireplace gradually gave way to a peculiar square box stove that for many years was typical of old schoolhouses, and the single long desk around the room was replaced by combination seats and desks made of heavy plank by some local carpenter and arranged in rows, similar to the schoolrooms of today. As the years went by, this old school furniture came to bear silent testimony to the jackknife activity of succeeding generations.

During the winters the schools were attended by many scholars who were almost full grown men and women, and these sessions were usually taught by a man in whom good muscular development was sought as well as "book learning," for one of the playful amusements of the big boys of those times, when things did not go to their liking, was to "put out" a teacher who was not physically able to prevent it. As the warm weather came on, the larger scholars gradually dropped out, as their services were needed on the farm or in the household, and then a woman teacher would continue the education of those too small to be of any service to their parents.

The school terms were of uncertain length and depended usually upon the ages of the children who attended that particular school. In communities where most of the pupils were old enough to work, school might be held only during the winter months, while in another place where there were many young scholars, the school would be kept nearly the whole year. The length of sessions also varied in different localities and was often regulated by the length of daylight, so that during the short days of winter the school day would last from eight o'clock in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon, and in the long days of summer, from seven to five.

Old Seats and Desks

For many years the teacher, man or woman, was obliged to "board around," that is, live with each family in the district a number of weeks or days proportionate to the number of pupils from that house, an arrangement which was more or less pleasant according to circumstances.

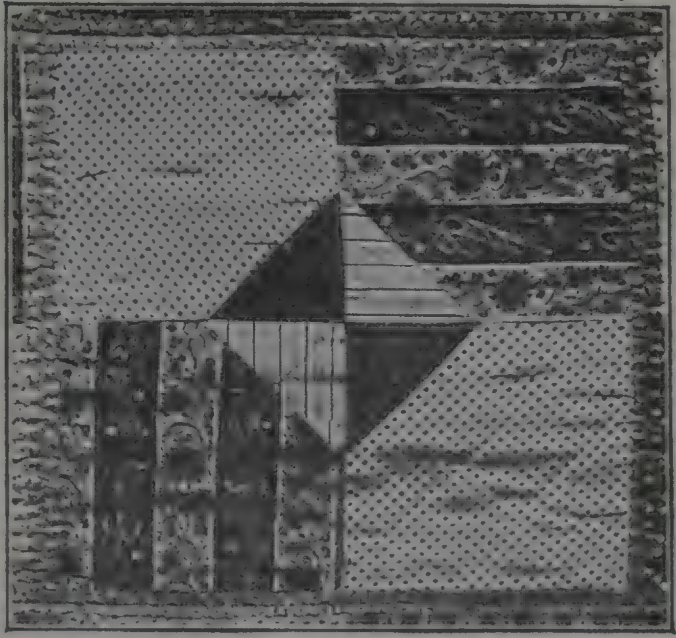
Sewing and Knitting

In the days when our grandmothers were little girls, among the first things that they had to learn were sewing and knitting; and one of the most highly prized possessions of every young girl that was well brought up was a ‘‘sampler’’ worked by her own hands. The samplers were worked with colored silks or wool on a kind of linen or canvas, and were designed to show the different stitches with which the maker was familiar and the skill with which they could be used. In the simpler forms they usually consisted of the alphabet and figures, together with the date and name of maker. In the more elaborate ones, in addition to the alphabet, there were often verses of poetry, crude representations of trees, animals and flowers, and sometimes quite elaborate historical or fanciful scenes.

Somewhat similar to the samplers were the embroidered mourning pieces that were quite common in the beginning of the nineteenth century. On these were represented in elaborate needlework funeral urns, weeping willows, mourning doves, tombs and epitaphs, together with the name and date of death of the person whose memory they were designed to perpetuate.

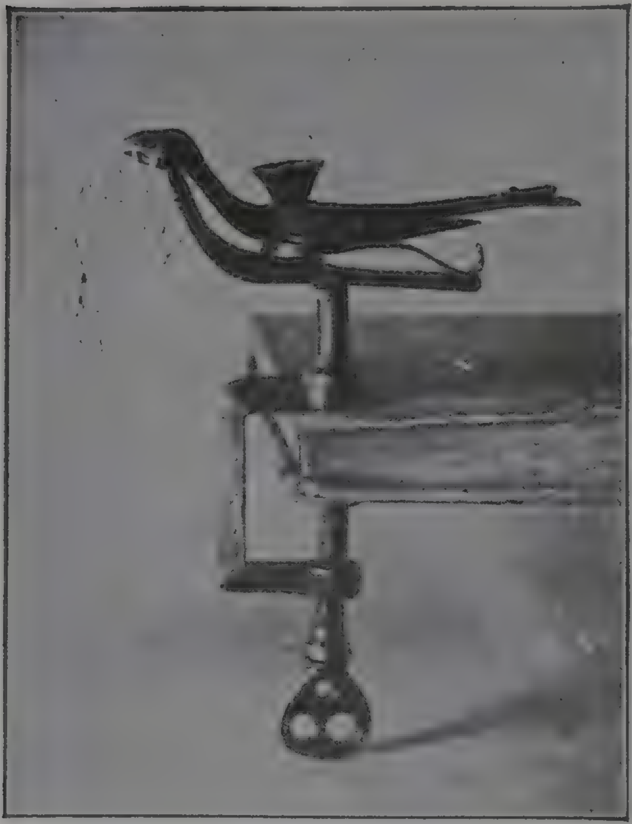
About the first real work that a young girl was allowed to do was the sewing of carpet rags: narrow strips of cloth of varying lengths and textures that were joined together into one long piece ready to be woven into the familiar rag carpet, or braided and sewed into round or oval floor rugs. After this came instruction in hemming, over-casting, felling seams, hemstitching, making buttonholes, and finally in the more elaborate fancy stitches that were popular in those days.

While still very young, the girls began to make patchwork for a quilt. At first they worked on very simple patterns, but as they grew older and acquired more skill, the pattern became more complex and required more judgment to arrange in the proper way. There were many standard patterns with names like ‘‘log-cabin,’’ ‘‘herring bone,’’ ‘‘Job’s trouble,’’ ‘‘rising sun,’’ "sugar bowl," etc., which were used by nearly every one, and many originated patterns of their own which they gladly exchanged with their neighbors. When the patchwork had grown to the size that was wanted for the quilt, a lining was made the same size, sometimes also of patchwork, and the two were laid together with a thin wadding of cotton or wool between them. This done, the quilting bars. four light strips of wood about ten feet long, were brought out and attached to the four sides of the quilt with strong coarse thread, and the ends placed on chair backs, to bring the work up to convenient height. Then there was a quilting bee, and the neighbors came in, and sitting all around the frames, quilted, or sewed through and through the cover and lining. As the work progressed, the bars were rolled together so that the quilters finally all came together in the center.


Patchwork

"Comforters," similar to the puffs of today, were also made in much the same manner, except that there was a thicker wadding put between the outside coverings, and instead of being quilted, they were "tied," that is, tacked through at regular intervals with a coarse yarn and a fancy knot tied on the upper side.

In those days of little heat there never seemed to be too many bed clothes in a house, and this making of quilts, begun at an early age, was usually kept up



Sewing Bird

through life, and every scrap of cloth that was made in cutting out garments, and all pieces of old cloth of any kind that still had some wear left were carefully saved for patchwork.

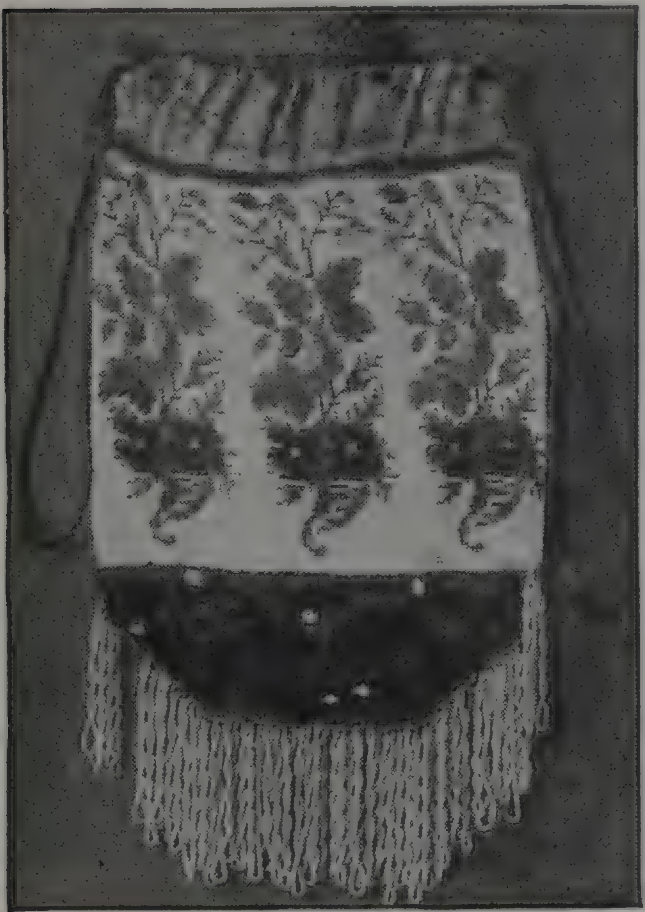
In sewing long seams, a "sewing bird," fashioned out of brass or silver was sometimes used. This bird was so constructed as to clamp firmly onto the edge of a table. By pressing down on the tail the beak opened to receive the end of the seam, which was thus firmly held in a convenient place for the seamstress.

Girls usually made all their own clothes under the watchful eyes of their mother, and some of them showed most elaborate and painstaking hand work by their skilful makers. In the clothes of the more prosperous, embroidery played an important part and petticoats were made and quilted in most elaborate patterns. The illustration shows a piece of the petticoat of Betty Greene, who, it is said, refused an offer of mar-

Quilted Petticoat

riage from Benjamin Franklin, and shows a deer and a bird in the design.

Knitting also was early taught to the girls of those past generations, and in many families the boys as well were made to learn some of the plainer stitches and to knit their own suspenders. At the age of four or five years girls were supposed to be able to knit "comfortables," or long woolen scarfs used to wrap around the neck and ears, and thick woolen "wristers" to protect the wrists from the intense cold of the old-fashioned long, cold winter. The next step was the learning of fancy stitches, and the mysteries of "widening" and "narrowing," and then followed the making of stockings and mittens for the family. By a skilful variation of the stitches, initials were knitted into mittens and the instep of stockings, and mittens were made in alternate squares of different colors, or double thick, with the outside of one color and the lining of another.


Bead Bag

One of the most skilful branches of knitting was the making of bead bags, purses and watch chains, much used by the fashionable people of a hundred years ago, and of which we have had a revival in the past few years. Some of the bags were ornamented with landscapes and various intricate designs worked out in beads of different colors. In their manufacture, the design had to be all planned, and the different beads strung on silk or linen before knitting. Considerable skill was required to string the beads in just the right number and position.

On these two accomplishments were our ancestors largely dependent for the things they wore, and while perhaps no more beautiful than the garments of today, there seems to be a subtle charm about those old things, in the making of which the skill and industry of the wearer played so large a part.

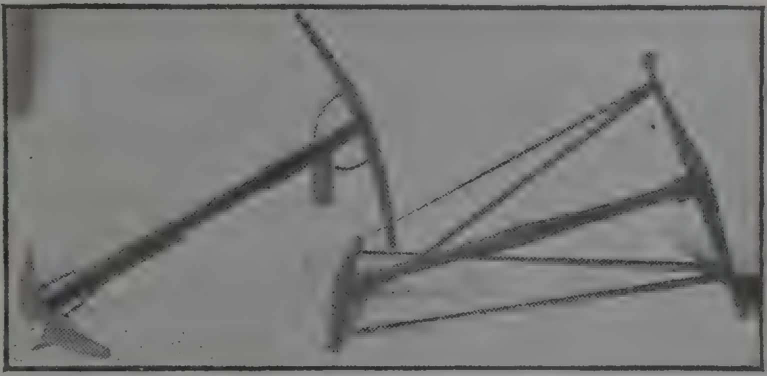
The Linen Industry

Of equal importance with the raising of sheep to produce the material from which woolen cloth was made, was the cultivation of flax from which was manufactured the fine linen for which our grandmothers were famous, and a ''patch'' was raised by nearly every farmer of a century ago.

The flax seed was sown in the latter part of April or the first of May, according to season and locality, and was usually ''fit'' to pull about the first of July. When the plants were about three inches high they were carefully weeded, great pains being taken not to injure their delicate branches, and in a few weeks more the drooping blue flowers appeared. Soon the blossom gave place to the seed-pod and when thoroughly ripe the plants were pulled up by the roots and spread out in the sun to dry. They were turned several times and when properly cured, the seed-pods were removed by ''rippling'' or drawing the stalks through a heavy iron comb. In some sections this process was not used but the seed was threshed out on a clean piece of grass ground. The seed was saved to plant next year and the stalks tied into small bundles and stacked to dry still more.

The next process was known as "retting," and consisted of placing the bundles in the waters of a pond or small stream and "steeping" them until a kind of fermentation had taken place which softened the fiber and partially rotted the leaves so that they were easily removed. This took from seven to fourteen days, the time varying with the temperature of the water and the ripeness of the flax.

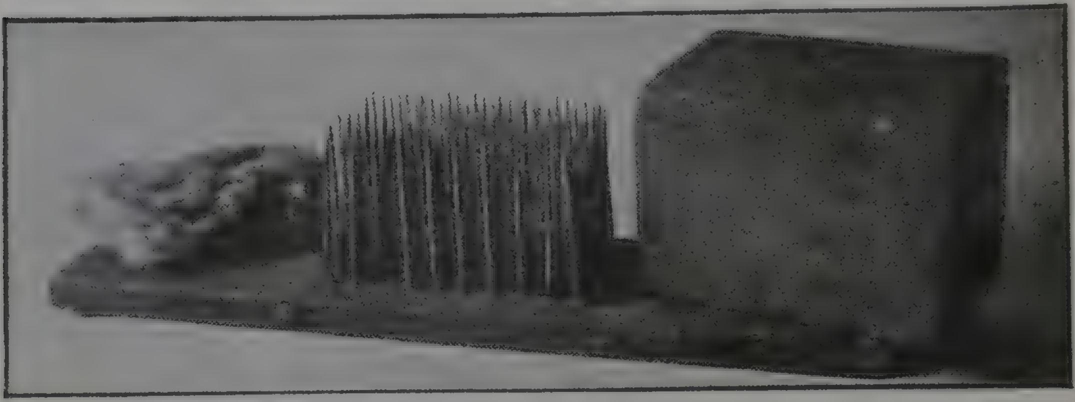
After the removal of the leaves the bundles were again dried. To remove the hard, woody center, and at the same time to separate the fibre, the stalks were next placed upon the flax brake and thoroughly crushed. This was hard work and had to be performed by a man or strong boy. The "brake" was usually a log about five feet long standing upon rugged legs and having its top side flattened. On this flat surface were set heavy strips of hard wood running lengthwise, while into a strong frame, hinged to the log at one end and heavily weighted at the other, was fastened a corresponding set of strips so arranged as to fit in between those on the log when they were brought together. The flag was laid between the two jaws of the brake, the upper part was raised and then brought down with all the strength of the operator.



Niddy Noodies or Hand Reels

This treatment broke up and removed most of the hard and useless parts of the plant, and the long tough filaments that remained were next laid on a block and "scutched" or beaten with long heavy "swingling" knives, to remove any small particles of bark or hard substance that might cling to them. What was left after this process was again tied into bundles called "strikes," placed in a wooden trough and pounded with a pestle until soft and pliable.

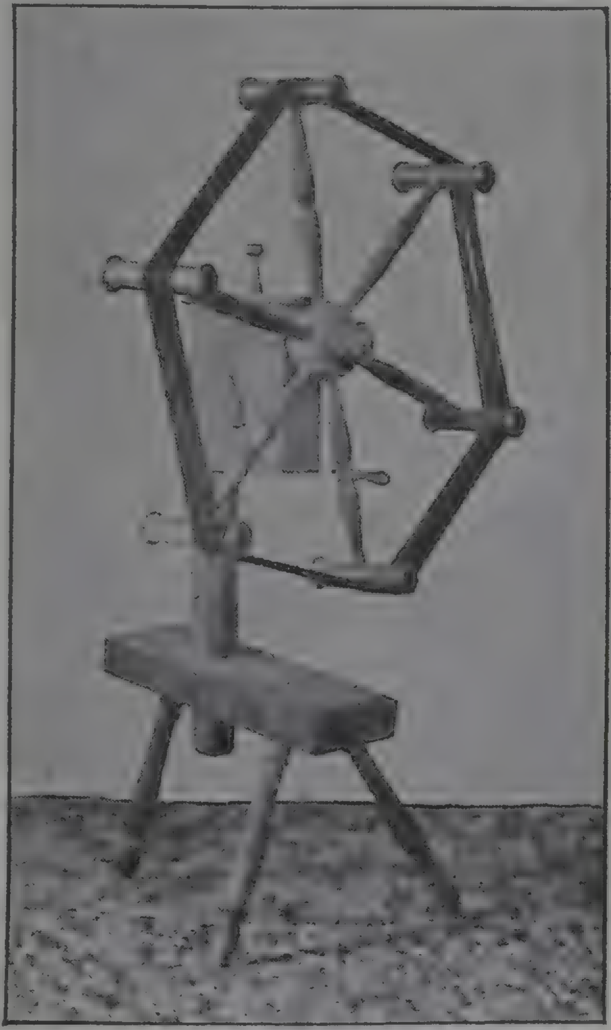
Next came the "hetcheling," which required considerable skill, for at this stage the flax could be easily spoiled. The hetchels were coarse iron combs made by fixing sharpened pieces of wire into a strong board, and were of numerous shapes, and different grades of fineness; upon these largely depended the appearance of the finished product. In use, a bunch of flax was taken in the hand, slightly moistened and then drawn through the hetchel teeth, combing out all the short and brittle pieces, leaving only the long even fibers that would make good thread. This was tied into bundles or hanks and was then ready for the spinning wheel. The short coarse strands that had been combed out were known as tow, and were saved to be spun into coarse yarn that was woven into skirts for the women and smocks for the men.



Flax Hetchel

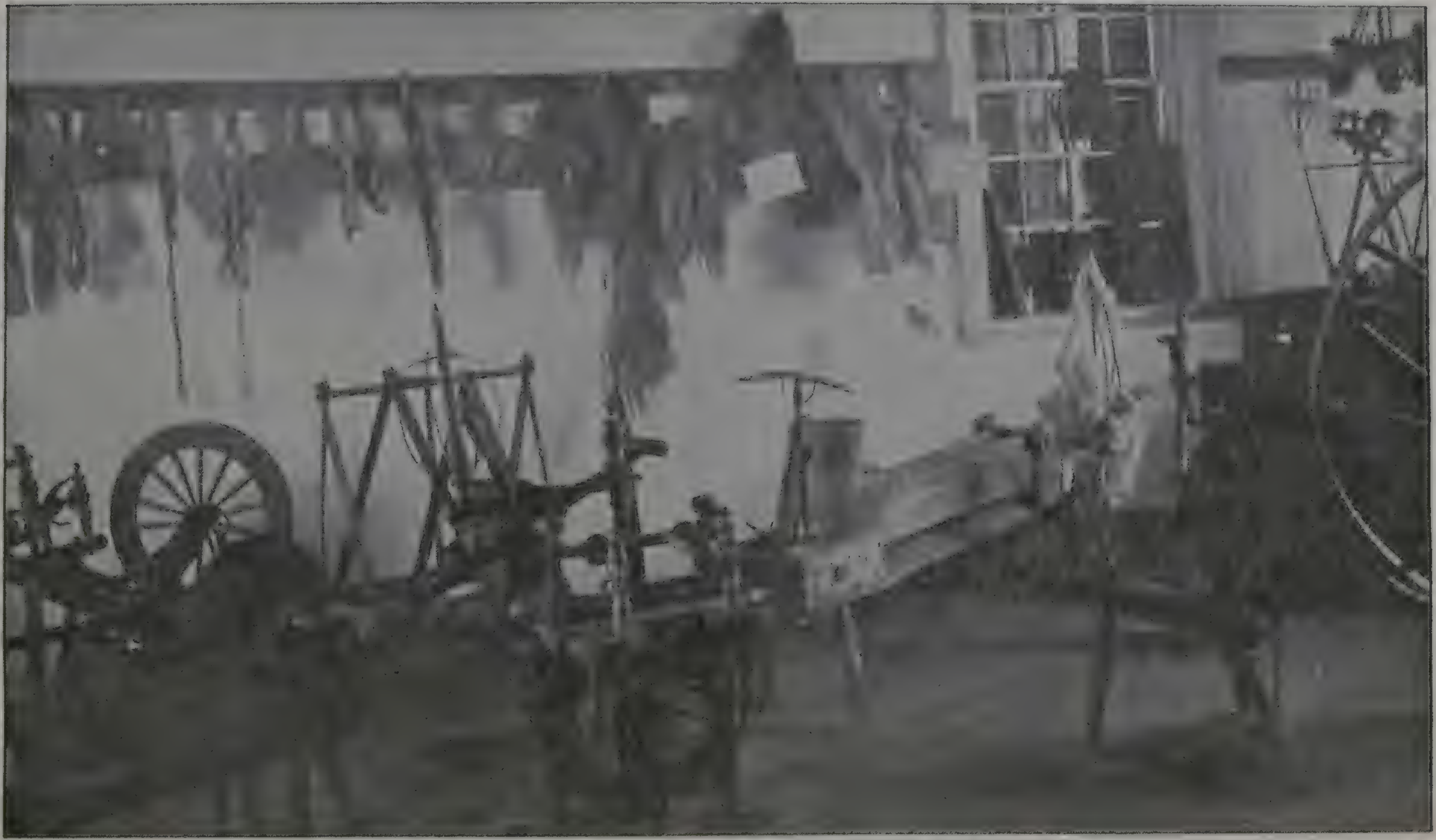
The wheel used in spinning flax was smaller than the woolen wheel, and the operator sat down instead of constantly walking backward and forward, as in spinning wool. Sitting in place at the wheel, the spinner moistened her fingers in a gourd shell filled with water that hung upon the frame, and selecting a few strands from the hank of flax, fastened the ends onto the spindle, pressed her foot upon the treadle, and the revolving spindle twisted the loose flax into a hard, and more or less even thread, according to the skill of the operator.

The finished thread was wound off onto reels, the skeins tied with "knotting bands" and thrown into a "bucking tub," originally made from a hollow log. Bleaching was now commenced by pouring hot water and weak lye into the tub or trough. This was repeated until the yarn became quite white, when, after a thorough washing, it was spread on boards in the sun to dry. This was only a preliminary bleaching, however, for after it was woven into cloth it was further bleached by the process known as "grassing."



Clock Reel

The long strips of cloth were stretched on a clean piece of greensward and held in place by pegs driven through loops fastened to the sides. This "whitening" often took several weeks, during which time it was one of the duties of the younger children to sprinkle the cloth several times daily with water from a gourd, in the bottom of



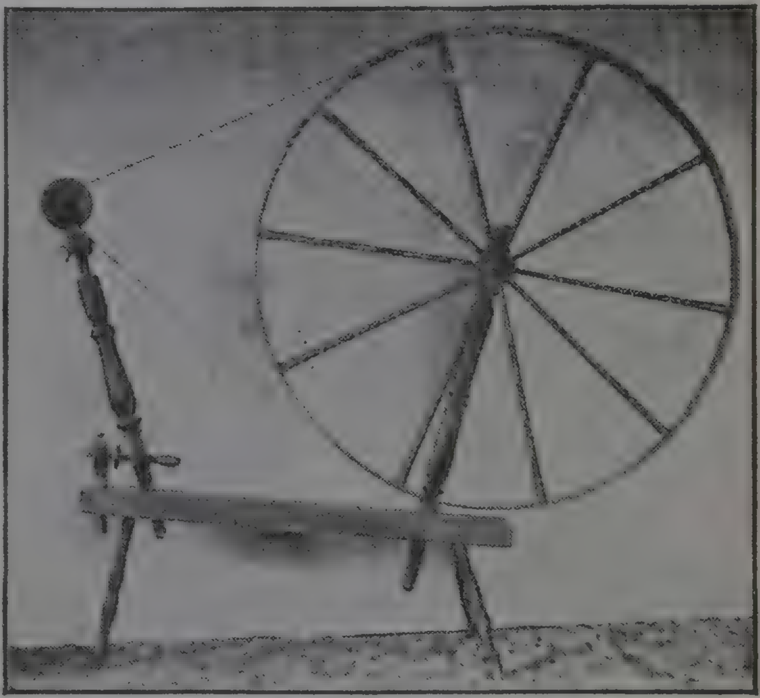
Old-Time Flax Utensils and Flax in Various Stages of Manufacture which had been bored or burned a series of small holes. After this final process the cloth was carefully dried and laid away ready to be made up into garments or other articles of household use as the needs of the family demanded.

Looked at from the view-point of today, the process seems slow and tiresome, but in the olden times a thorough knowledge of each step was considered an accomplishment, and many a bride of by-gone days was proud to know that her linen chest was filled to overflowing with the product of her well-trained hands.

Weaving Woolen Cloth

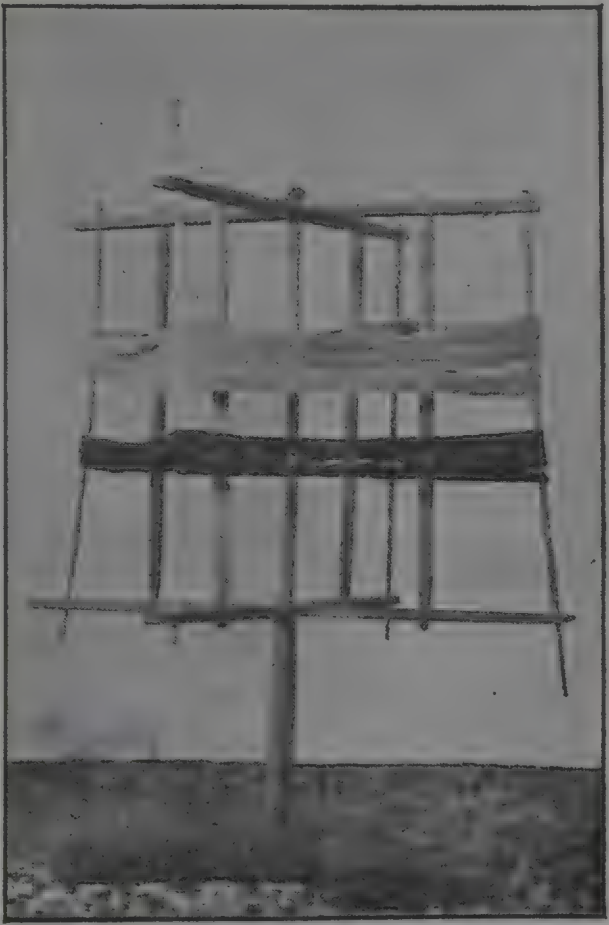
Before the time of woolen mills and clothing stores, one of the most important duties of our ancestors was the manufacture of the warm woolen cloths necessary for their comfort during the severe cold of the winters. From the time the wool was sheared from the sheep until the garments were ready to wear, every process in their manufacture had to be performed by the members of the household. The raising of sheep was a regular part of the work on every farm, and all girls, and sometimes boys as well, were taught to spin and weave.

The sheep shearing came in the spring or early summer, and the unwilling sheep were taken, one by one, and held on the ground, while, with a pair of sharp shears similar to those used for clipping the edges of lawns, the coat of long, warm, wool that had protected them from the winter cold was quickly clipped from their bodies and rolled into large soft bundles. These bundles, or fleeces as they were called, were then turned over to the women folks of the family, whose first duty was to sort over the wool carefully and pick out all the coarse or dirty locks to be made into yarn for knitting, while the fine white wool was saved to be spun into yarn for weaving and passed on to the process of "carding." The cards were thin pieces of board to which was attached leather thickly set with strong, bent teeth of wire. In use, one card was rested on the knees and a small quantity of wool drawn lightly across the teeth. When a sufficient amount had accumulated a second card was drawn over the first one until the fiber was well straightened out. Then with a peculiar twist, only learned by much practice, the wool was deftly gathered into a small soft roll and was then ready for spinning.


Spinning Wheel

The big wheel was brought out and the housewife showed one of her most skilful accomplishments. Taking one of the small carded rolls, the end was quickly fastened to the spindle. With the left hand, a firm hold was taken of the roll a short distance from the spindle, and with the right hand, the big wheel was put in motion. Then to the merry hum of the wheel, a few steps were taken backward, the roll being held high as it was twisted, and with a forward movement of the spinner, the finished yarn was wound firmly onto the spindle. Another roll was taken up, fastened to the untwisted end, and the same movements were repeated. When the spindle became full, the band connecting it with the big wheel was removed and the yarn run onto a clock reel, which indicated by a revolving hand the amount wound off and gave a sharp click of warning when forty threads, or a knot, had accumulated. Each knot was tied with a small piece of yarn and seven knots made a skein. There was also a hand reel known as a ''niddy-noody'' on which the yarn was wound by hand with a peculiar wobbly motion difficult to describe. When the yarn was to be used for knitting or for coarse cloth, one spinning was usually sufficient, but if a close. fine cloth was to be woven, it was spun a second time and twisted into a hard wiry thread. In this case the first spinning was called a ''roving.''

''Swifts,'' a revolving frame of light construction and adjustable as to size, were used to hold the skeins while the yarn was being wound into balls for knitting, or by means of a quilling wheel onto quills or bobbins for the shuttles, if it was to be woven.



Swifts

The old-time loom was a large square frame built of good sized timbers, with the large warp beam in the rear and the cloth beam on which the finished cloth was rolled near the front. The warp was ''drawn in'' to the eyes of two harnesses connected with foot treadles in such a way that when one treadle was depressed every other thread of the warp was carried down, and through the shed thus formed, was thrown the shuttle carrying the "filling." Then by the action of the other treadle the alternate threads of the warp were depressed and the shuttle returned. "Temples" were stretching bars something after the style of some modern carpet stretchers and adjustable to various widths. Each end had pins to catch into the selvage of the cloth and hold it firmly at even width while the reed beat the filling into place.

Quilling Wheel

The final step was the cutting and making of the garments from the finished cloth. For many years this was done by the mistress of the household with no little skill, and in the time of the Revolution the clothes of the soldiers were fashioned in many cases by the patriotic women of the day. While perhaps not up to the fashion standards of today, for warmth and durability these home spun garments of long ago have never been surpassed.

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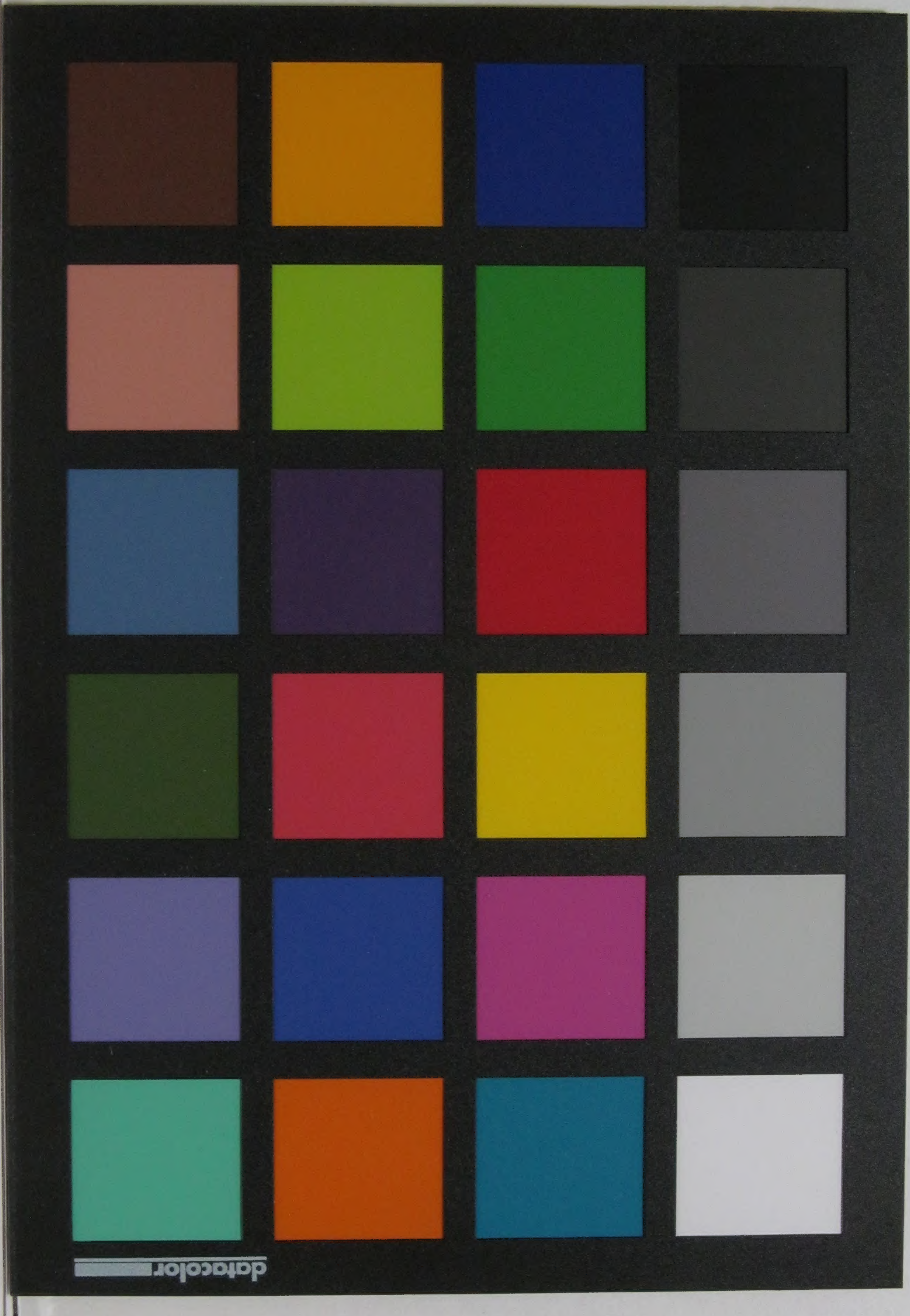
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LIFE IN COLONIAL DAYS

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